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Writing an Rx for doctors' woes

Terdoslavich, William. **Computer Reseller News.** Manhasset: Jan 29, 1996. , Iss. 668; pg. SS17, 2 pgs

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Abstract (Article Summary)

To help change physicians' minds about adopting computer products, VAR Berdy Medical Systems Inc. is selling and supporting a patient information and billing application. An application called SmartDocs 1.2 is bundled with Psion Inc.'s 3A personal digital assistant to improve the way doctors track and maintain information critical to their patients, insurance companies, or accounts-payable departments. The software, which began shipping in April 1995, simplifies the process doctors must use to accurately track billing codes. Berdy Medical will customize systems to meet the needs of specialists who work with a limited number of diagnostic and billing codes. SmartDocs is compact, with an attractive price and software that is easy to use.

Full Text (1247 words)*Copyright CMP Publications, Inc. Jan 29, 1996*

ALTHOUGH DOCTORS MAY BE on the cutting edge of science and medicine, some physicians have been somewhat reticent to adopt computer products VAR Berdy Medical Systems Inc. is helping to change that, with the sale and support of a patient information and billing application.

The Rochelle Park, N.J.-based reseller has developed SmartDocs 1.2, an application it bundles with Psion Inc.'s 3A personal digital assistant, to improve the way doctors track and maintain information critical to their patients, insurance companies or accounts-payable departments. Designed to replace the scraps of paper traditionally used by medical professionals, SmartDocs enables doctors to correctly indicate patients' ailments and treatments.

"It's an aid for a physician seeing patients in a hospital," said Rick Holtmeier, president of Berdy Medical Systems.

"Sooner or later,

the doctor

hands a wad of paper to a clerk. About 30 percent of all services provided by a physician don't get billed."

The software, which began shipping in April 1995, simplifies the process doctors must use to accurately track billing **codes**. Thanks to a text license Berdy Medical Systems obtained from the American Medical Association, physicians can use a word-search feature to enter a patient's **diagnosis** and get the corresponding ICD-9 **code** for **diagnosis** and the correct CPT **code** for procedure. There are 14,000 different **code** numbers for **diagnosis**, and about 8,000 **codes** for procedures. Upon returning to the office, a clerk or physician can either print out the data or download it to a desktop PC-based billing program. "No one can remember them," he said.

Berdy Medical Systems will further customize systems to meet the needs of specialists who work with a limited number of diagnostic and billing **codes**. To date, the VAR has developed **confirmations** of SmartDocs for approximately two-dozen specialties, Holtmeier said.

"It comes in on the number of procedure **codes** they use," he said. "Plastic surgery has 3,100 procedure **codes**. Orthopedics has 2,000 **codes**," said Holtmeier, noting some of the bulkier specialties.

Psychiatry, in contrast, has its own set of **codes** called DSM-IV, which numbers only 144 **codes**, he added.

A confessed lover of new gadgets, Dr. Harvey Shub, the past president of the medical staff at Florida Hospital in Orlando, Fla., had already bought a Psion handheld unit from a local retailer when he saw an advertisement for SmartDocs. After sending the unit to Berdy Medical Systems to have the software installed, Shub realized that he required specialized **codes**.

"Procedures that were unique to

my field

were not in there," he said. Berdy Medical Systems was able to install the few additional **codes** needed to match Shub's gastroenterology and colon-rectal surgery specializations. "I can't figure out how I got by without

the Psion and SmartDocs systems

," Shub said.

Dr. Richard Righthand, a general internist with a practice in Cliffside Park, N.J.—and rounds that frequently take him to three area hospitals—has seen his handheld-computer purchase improve his bottom line.

"Probably without it, I'd miss out on billing patients," Righthand said.

When the practice becomes inundated with emergencies, updated billing data can get lost in the shuffle. Being able to take down a patient's name and enter information immediately reduces the likelihood of missed billing opportunities, according to Righthand.

In fact, it was the billing capability that first drew Righthand to the SmartDocs solution. Today, the doctor also uses the unit to store text files of stock lectures, which he downloads to a printer and circulates among students when he teaches.

Although Holtmeier himself is not a doctor, the reseller—which specializes in the medical market and also offers a PC-based patient-record application—consults regularly with a group of physicians who aid in the development of new products and support offerings. In fact, it was one doctor's utterance of "If I could only do this . . ." that led to the eventual creation of SmartDocs, Holtmeier recalled.

The doctor wanted a **PDA** that could fit into a shirt pocket, and that could handle the tasks of recording **diagnosis** and treatment notes. Berdy Medical Systems narrowed the hardware choice to the Psion 3A or the Sharp Electronics Inc. Wizard. The Psion 3A offered a wide screen for a unit of its size, and the graphical user interface consisted of a pointer/dropdown menu system. The Psion also allows users to make use of a word processor or spreadsheet by simply switching between applications, the VAR found.

"Performance was fine on this device," Holtmeier said. But there was another factor in Psion's favor.

"Psion was organized to work with VARs. Sharp was not," Holtmeier said. "We investigated

 Hewlett-Packard Co.

and

 Apple Computer Inc.'s

Newton and found the price points were too high and

the units

too bulky for the application."

To maximize the market for the solution, Berdy Medical Systems wanted to keep to a price point of about \$500 for SmartDocs. This represented another factor in favor of the Sharp and Psion offerings, Holtmeier said. If a physician already possesses a Psion 3A, then the software alone costs \$270. SmartDocs Basic, which the VAR bundles on a Psion with 256K of memory, sells for \$545. The most expensive implementation is a special unit used by plastic surgeons. Priced at \$845, this version of SmartDocs uses the 2-Mbyte version of the Psion handheld device, he said.

In addition to the hardware's compact size and attractive price point, Berdy Medical Systems determined that the **PDA**-based software would have to be easy to use for doctors to quickly embrace the solution.

"The most

work

a doctor has to do is key in a few characters," Holtmeier said.

For example, if a doctor types in "infarction" as the **diagnosis**, a list of 40 to 50 **codes** will appear, and the doctor selects the correct one. This information is then attached to a patient number taken from the patient's roster. Complete patient records are back in the office. If physicians know who they are scheduled to see, they can download specific information prior to making rounds at multiple locations. The information is later downloaded via a laser printer or a fax machine, Holtmeier said.

Entries are usually about 50 bytes per patient, so there is plenty of room in the unit if it is carrying 2 Mbytes of memory, he said.

"If 2 megabytes aren't enough, you can always buy extra RAM diskettes for this," Holtmeier said.

Like the medical market, which is in a state of constant discovery, the reseller is not resting on its laurels. Some doctors, like Shub, would like to see a handheld unit that also features a fax, a telephone and a beeper.

Another useful feature would be one that would "let the user configure what the downloaded file looks like," Shub said. This would allow doctors to use commonly used terms that would be linked to the **codes**. For example, the **code** for "inflammation of the lower intestines" can be linked to its everyday name of diarrhea, he said.

Doctors are looking to the channel to provide additional software upgrades, as well. For example, Shub would like to see a link between SmartDocs' listing of procedures and a doctor's own fee schedule. Enabling doctors to add their own codes pertaining to their specialties would also be a plus, he said.

Righthand said he would like commonly used medical formulas, such as drip calculations, included in the handheld system; and signout lists that show patients who are being passed on to another physician for referral or specialization.

"I wish there was a programming language capable to write my own programs," Righthand added.

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